1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

281 apparently dried without dressing, together with
513 skins of rabbits, mountain sheep, antelope, etc, usually tattered or torn into fragments. Commonly the hides and pelts are nearly or quite in natural condition, retaining the hair, fur, or feathers. The dressing is apparently limited to scratching and gnawing away superfluous flesh, followed by some rubbing and greasing; tanning is apparently unknown. By far the most abundant of the collective possessions are the pelican-skin robes, which form
[439] the sole article of recognized barter with aliens. The aggregate stock accumulated at any time is but meager, never too much to be borne on the heads and backs of the clan in case of unexpected decamping.

412 Aside from the painting paraphernalia, there is
302 but a single conspicuous toilet article; this is a hair-brush made of yucca fiber bound into cylindrical form, as illustrated in figure 29. This article is in frequent use; both women and men give much attention to brushing their own long and luxurious locks and cultivating the hair and scalps of their children, the process being regarded as not only directly useful but in some measure sacramental. Ordinarily the hair is parted in the middle and brushed straight, the tresses being permitted to wander at will and never braided or bound or restrained by fillets save in imitation of Caucasian customs on the frontier; though in certain ceremonies the pelage is gathered in a lofty knot on the top-head.[1]

854 The Seri cradle is merely a bow of paloblanco or other switch with rude cross-sticks lashed on, as shown in figure 30. On this is laid a small pelican-skin robe, with a quantity of pelican down for a diaper, and perhaps a few pelican feathers attached as plumes to wave over the occupant's face; though on the frontier these primitive devices are largely replaced by rags.

283 Among the important appurtenances of Seri life are the cords used for belts and necklaces, as well as for the attachment of ceremonial headdresses, for converting the kilts into bags, and for numberless minor purposes. The finest of these are made from human hair; and for this purpose the combings are carefully kept, twisted into strands, and wound on thorns or sticks in slender bobbins, such as that illustrated

FIG. 3.—Hair spindle.

[1] Cf. Hardy, Travels, p. 280.

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

283 in figure 31. When the accumulation suffices the strands are doubled or quadrupled, as shown in figures 32 and 33, and the cords are either

FIG. 32.—Human-hair cord.

applied to immediate use or added to the matron's meager store against emergency demands. The cordage used for other purposes than apparel-

FIG. 33.—Horsehair cord.

ing is commonly made from fiber extracted either from the roots of the mesquite or the stipes of the agave; usually it is well twisted and notably

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

283 [237]

uniform in size and texture; an inferior example appears in figure 34. The manes and tails of horses and other stock are also converted into cordage, of which the chief known application is in toy riatas. It is of no small significance that the most highly prized cordage material is human hair, and that its chief uses are connected with the person; that the next in order of diminishing preciousness is that derived from the fibrous plants, which is used in balsa-making, bowstrings, harpoon cords, etc, as well as in the native fabrics; and that the least prized material is that derived from imported animals, which is largely limited in its utilization to youthful imitation of Caucasian industries; for the association of material with function reflects a distinctive feature of

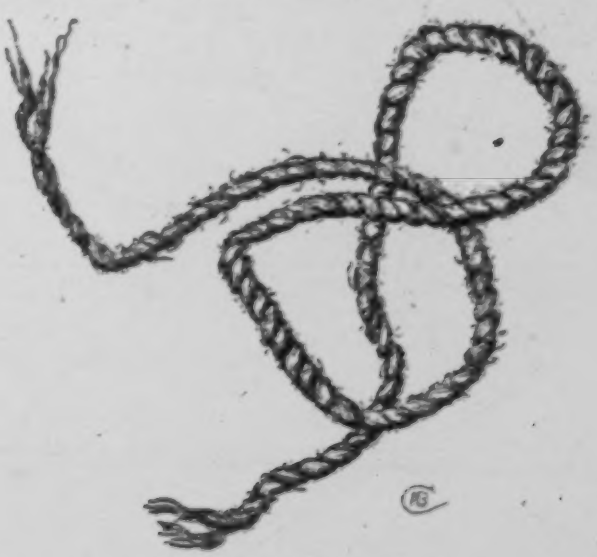

FIG. 34.—Mesquite-fiber rope.

primitive thought, akin to that displayed in somewhat higher culture as synecdochic magic, the doctrine of signatures, etc.

Partly because of that decadence of aboriginal devices correlated with acculturation, partly by reason of imperfect observation, practically nothing is known of Seri spinning and weaving, and little of Seri sewing. The religiously-guarded hair-combings are twisted in the fingers and wound on stick-bobbins without aid of mechanical appliances; and, so far as has been observed, the final making of hair cords is merely a continuation of the strictly manual process. The agave stipes and mesquite roots are alleged by vaqueros to be retted in convenient lagoons and barrancas (a statement corroborated by the finding of half a dozen sections of mesquite root soaking in a lagoon near Punta Anti-

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

283 gualla by the 1895 expedition), and then hatcheled with the hupf or the edge of a shell; when the fibers are gathered in slender wisps or loosely wound coils, both of which were among the possessions of the Seri matrons at Costa Rica in 1894. So far as could be ascertained, the final processes parallel those of hair-cord making, i. e., the fibers are patiently sorted into strands, sized in the fingers and twisted by rolling on the thigh, the strands being subsequently combined in similar fashion.[1] Neither the weaving nor the woven fabrics of the Seri have ever been seen by technologic students so far as known, though the fabrics are shown in Von Bayer's photographs and have been described by various observers. According to Señor Encinas, they resemble coarse bagging, and are woven or netted quite plainly. The ordinary sewing material is sinew, used in connection with a bone awl (a good example of which is illustrated in figure 35), a fish

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412
[239]

FIG. 35—Bone awl.

FIG. 36—Wooden awls.

spine or bone, a cactus thorn, or either the mandible of a water-bird or a hard-wood skewer shaped after this natural needle (figure 36 *a* and *b*). Sometimes hair or vegetal fiber is substituted for the sinew; and for certain purposes an agave thorn, with the fibers naturally attached, serves for needle and thread.

[524] [1] A rope-twisting device of the sort commonly employed by southwestern Indians was found in use among Seri boys at Costa Rica in 1894, and was included in the Seri collection; but the indications were that the device was a mere toy used, like the horse-hair rosin mark by its side, only in youthful sports.

2:Davis & Dawson S-6 (1923-1949) 1945
MUSI Seri MUSI

THE SAVAGE SERIS OF SONORA—I

By EDWARD H. DAVIS AND R. YALE DAWSON

000 us first acquaint ourselves with the life and habits of the Seri before the Spaniard trod upon his thorny land.

131 His homeland speaks first of isolation. Tiburon Island, in the Gulf of California, and the adjacent coast of Sonora are pro-

[142]
[291]
[283]

FIG. 1. CHICO ROMERO, SERI CHIEF
WEARING A KILT OF PELICAN SKINS WHICH USED TO BE THEIR ONLY MATERIAL FOR GARMENTS. NOTE THE CORD MADE OF HUMAN HAIR CARRIED IN THE HANDS.

tected on one side by stormy seas and on the other by even more forbidding deserts. The natural isolation of this habitat set its people apart from all other human beings, and the two or three thousand Seris, wandering between their desert island and the mountain-

[p.193(B)]

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1940) 1948
NU31 Seri NU31

396 the extremities. Throughout the process the
cord used for lashing was laboriously made
[283] by hand and mouth by the women who ob-
tained the fibrous raw material from mes-
[462] quite tree roots, from the yucca or the
maguay. Three of the finished bundles were
lashed together to form a watercraft some
thirty feet in length and of four-foot beam.
These large balsas were buoyant enough to
carry several members of a family across El
Infiernillo channel. One-man balsas were
also made (Fig. 5) principally for use in
turtle fishing.

225 Except during the egg-laying season
411 turtles had to be sought from the balsa. The
Seris lacked tool sense in the extreme, but
their clumsy brains had devised a harpoon
for use against the turtle. The hard, pene-
trating point was commonly made of native
ironwood, but may also have been the sharp-
ened tooth of a sea lion or the shin bone of
a deer. It was fitted and firmly cemented
with mesquite gum to a short, hardwood
foreshaft whose rounded end fitted into the

[p. 197(C)]
[Text continues on p. 198(B)]

3:Davis & Dawson I-5 (1922-1940) 1946
MU32 Reel MU32

[301]
[302]
[386]
[516]

FIG. 11. PAINTING THE FACE
USING A RED PIGMENT OBTAINED FROM THE TUBERS.

223 lice-infested carcasses were then gathered
264 and brought to a central place among the stinking rocks where a gluttonous feast was held in the dark, the long ahungered tribesmen gorging themselves with the soft entrails and succulent parts, and carousing in the carnage until overcome by slumber.

281 The day following the slaughter, the
294 matrons collected the carcasses with least damaged plumage and carefully removed the skins, which were then gnawed and sucked clean of flesh and grease and dried in the sun (Fig. 8). From two or more of these skins they made a kilt or robe (Figs. 1, 2), the principal apparel, not so much for protection from cold as from the scratch and prick of the abounding spines and thorns of Seriland. The skins were sewed with sinew and often held in place on the body by a
283 cord made of human hair (Fig. 1). The
302 culture of their long, luxuriant hair, indeed, was an important matter. They brushed their hair regularly with a brush fashioned

[p. 200(A)]

283 from coarse, wiry grass stems, and saved all
302 the brushings to be used in the making of strong threads and cords.

The fleetness of foot and remarkable physi-
147 cal endurance of these people attest to the
481 rigorous and difficult life in Seriland where the ability of an individual to survive a season of want depended upon the reserve energy of his own body by which he could carry himself long distances in search of food and yet have strength to return to a waterhole, left miles behind. The slender, sinewy limbs and capacious chests of the Seris, in whom no trace of obesity has ever been observed, show clearly the result of untold centuries of selection of the strong by the severity of the environment, where water,
[312] too heavy for transport, too difficult of storage, is yet always within reach of an organism strong enough to journey ten, twenty, or even fifty miles in search of it.

Perhaps the most severe physical exercise
224 practiced by the Seris was the chase of animal game, particularly since it was often resorted to only after a period of weakening hunger which prompted the all-out effort to obtain adequate food supply. Days of wandering over the deserts in search of vegetable food were sometimes unrewarded, and although rabbits were to be had for the chase, they were too small to be of much consequence in the feeding of a family. The deer were fairly plentiful and provided excellently for a lasting feast.

The deer hunt was conducted by several tribesmen without weapons. When an animal was sighted it was followed by one and circled by others of the party, chased until frantic and exhausted, whereupon one of the men rushed upon it, threw it to the ground and caved in its skull with a stone.

The most avidly sought prey in the Seri chase were the helpless young and heavily pregnant does which were pursued and rent to fragments with a horrible fury, particularly with intent upon the succulent tidbits afforded by the fetal flesh.

222 A time of ease and plenty came each summer, for usually in late May or June the cactus plants with which Seriland abounds begin to mature their fruits. In the foothills of Sierra Seri on the mainland, great

5:Dawson N-5 (1940) 1944 NU31 Seri NU31

ingenuity of a modern shipbuilder to have constructed a boat. These simple, desert people, however, through centuries of struggle for life in their desolate realm had learned to use every natural material available to them, however laborious the tasks and inefficient the products. The carrizal reed, *Phragmites communis*, grows about the few permanent water holes of Seriland, and from countless numbers of these slender, buoyant canes they built their watercraft. The reeds were stripped of leaves and gathered in long bundles, bound together and gradually augmented by more and more interlaced canes until a bundle 18 to 30 feet long and 1½ feet in diameter, tapering at both ends, was made. Three of these were then bound together with cords of fiber or human hair, making a maneuverable one or two man raft, easily transported to the shores.

The mesquite tree, *Prosopis juliflora*, provided fiber for cords. The flexible outer tissues of the roots were stripped off, soaked and progressively pounded, split and worked between hand and mouth until very slender, fibrous threads were obtained which were then twisted into cords. In some cases a coarse, rough fabric was woven from these fibers, but most garments were made of pelican skins. The strips of workable mesquite root or sometimes yucca fiber were also used in making doughnut-shaped head pads which aided in balancing the capacitous earthen water jars as they were carried on the heads of the women over rough and stony trails from water hole to camp site.

While occupying the turtle fishing camps on El Infiernillo during the good season, vegetable supplements to the fishy diet were few. Every nourishing seed or woody fruit yielded by the desert was carefully gathered; even the tiny seeds of the sea grass, *Ruppia*, were sorted from beach drift and made into meal. Never did the Seris learn to cultivate any crop or domesticate any animals other than the half wild coyote dogs that lived in mutual toleration with them. Even had they done so, their success in the barren, waterless land would have been small.

Sterile as is the Seri's hinterland, for a time each summer the thorny plants with which it is so profusely stocked ripen an abundant crop of fruit. The cacti in particular yield a wonderful harvest of luscious and succulent fruits, and toward this fortuitous supply the Seris were accustomed to move in June and July. The foothills of Sierra Seri on the mainland are adorned with great numbers of giant cacti, *Pachycereus Pringlei*, *Carnegiea gigantea* and *Lemaireocereus Thurberi* from which the luscious pitahayas were readily knocked down when ripe. The Indians wandered into the cactus forest and after a simple ritual marking the beginning of the feast, proceeded to gorge themselves for weeks on the succulent fruit until waning supply and cloying appetite drove them back to more severe food-getting activity by the sea. They did not customarily find it necessary to leave the cactus forest, however, as soon as the supply of fruits was no longer sufficient, for by the time the fruiting season was ended they had provided themselves with a second harvest. The pitahayas, gorged in such tremendous quantity throughout the season, were very imperfectly digested; the miriads of hard seeds, particularly, passed through the system unchanged and with the preservation of these in mind the Indians carefully collected with the aid of large sea shells all such seedy discharges and let them dry in the desert sun. Thus, as the supply of fresh fruit faded they proceeded to the use of this hoard

261 will exist on very small rations, bear burdens, and walk long dis-
262 tances. Their food is anything that walks, flies, crawls or swims,
[252] and they eat it raw with the same relish that we eat it cooked. There is but one thing they will not eat; they draw the line on the Gila monster. They are the most perfect type of human being adapted to desert conditions that exists today. Convey them blindfolded many miles into the heart of the desert, empty-handed, remove their blinders, and they will find both food and water where others would perish. The Papagos and Yaquis do almost as well."

302 We gave the women a small bag of flour and three or four cubes of
[123] sugar around, and the men three packets of tobacco each and two boxes of matches. Matches with them are very precious and are rarely used. Rather than use a match a woman came over to our fire and borrowed some coals to rebuild her fire. From this point the nearest matches are a good deal over one hundred and twenty miles distant, so they have to economize in every thing.

422 Each rag is valuable, and flour, sugar, coffee and rifle shells
[434] are absolutely priceless. While they know money, it has no value here.
[437] Only commodities go here. The most highly prized things are boards to
[389] make boats and rifle shells to get game and protect themselves. All empty shells are saved, the primer punched out, straightened, a match head put in, a little pinch of powder on top, the shell filled up, a long bullet inserted, the shell pinched tight, and a fresh set of ammunition is made.

142 The women and children certainly did look wild. Their hair was
291 frowsy and unkempt, their skirts and waists a patchwork of dirty rags
302 coming just below the knees; their features seamed and hard and cruel. Their complexion was very dark. They had no under garments. The children wore only a dirty shirt coming a little below their thighs, and even that is ragged. One or two of the women had a dirty bandanna over their heads. How I wished I could have seen them in their ancient, picturesque pelican-skin kilts!

302 I happened to witness the operation of a Seri beauty parlor. A
[824] mother brushed the hair of her thirteen-year-old daughter with a brush
[283] made from the fibrous roots of a certain grass tied together with
[515] sinew. During the operation if she came across a *piojo*, and she found several, she plucked him away from his feeding ground and dropped him in the fire.

The hair neatly brushed, the mother then mixed paint in a small vessel and with a tiny stick painted a bright blue design under the eyes and across the cheeks and nose, and then she added narrow white stripes, which, contrasting with the blue and the dark skin, produced a very striking effect. This paint is easily removed and the women often paint and remove three different face designs in one day.

304 I did not see tattoo work on either men or women, nor did they
301 wear ceremonial feathers as did our western Indians.

wear ceremonial feathers as did our western Indians. I saw no skin or cutaneous disease, or evidence of tuberculosis or of trachoma---the curse of our Indians.

One boy-child of five years was a handsome child---fat, round, sturdy, with roving great black eyes, large thick lips, a picture of perfect health. He was almost naked. His hair was done in a pigtail with a red string braided into it. His face like all the others was dirty, but he waded into the shallow water with a short spear and I saw him catch two crabs with his little harpoon. The water did not bother his face.

They had no plates or eating tools, except large deep clam shells, cast up by the sea, which served as cups and dippers. Their long, keen belt knives were used for cutting, carving or skinning, and always the fingers for eating. They gathered in a circle around an olla of seeds of long grass growing on the sea bottom prepared by winnowing, parching and grinding, and then cooked with turtle oil. Each one dipped his or her fingers into the olla and conveyed them to the mouth without losing a drop, and licked them off with great relish.

The dogs eat with the family. There were six or seven half-starved ones. If someone picked up a piece of turtle flipper the dog often took the first lick at it, bit off a piece or licked it before it reached the owner's mouth. The dogs were not punished. They were just slapped to keep them out of the pots.

We had a great time that evening in Seriland. The young man played his violin. This consisted of a hollow box cut out of a *palo verde* tree, and a piece of pine about sixteen inches long; terminating in a hollow where a single peg was fitted. The one string was twisted deer sinew, and the bridge was a small round clam shell at the far end. The bow was a small bent stick and some black horsehair. On the handle was a wad of rosin fastened underneath. By fingering this string a few weak squeaky notes were made, and this was the classical music of the Seris.

Manuel Encina seized his gourd rattle and began chanting. Herrera tapped a tin can and I beat on an inverted basket and the orchestra was in full swing. A young girl, Rosa, dragged out a turtle shell and standing on it began to dance. This dance consisted of stepping up and down quickly with each foot alternately, and this stamping, barefooted, emitted a hollow sound. Every once in a while I let out an Indian yell which pleased the Seris very much. For two hours they had a real swell time. We took one flashlight of the proceeding.

Each family was in their hut, which afforded very slight shelter as they were only partially roofed over and the sides were broken down in places. The huts were all adjoining and each had a little campfire, which did not give much illumination, so the dancing was in semi-darkness.

[text continues on p. 163]

123 We have given the Seris so much we are now short ourselves. Variety is very restricted. We haven't enough tin dishes or tools to go around, but that does not trouble us at all. All the cleaning is done in salt water and sand. Fresh water is only used to drink. Nothing else. We can't even take a shave. Not a drop of water. We are very lax in our personal toilets and appearance. We are barefooted always in the boat, as we have to wade to get the boat in deep water, and often the waves slosh on board.

This boat is made of a hollowed log twenty feet long and three feet, three inches wide, and she is very cranky. She almost upset with us several times. When everybody is placed in it, it is difficult to even change a posture without endangering everybody. She has no keel and leaks some, so we have to bail out often. But she is a good sea boat and rides the waves well if they are not too rough.

123 439 [203] [484] One evening we decided to get a message through to Juan Tomas, the Chief, some twenty or thirty miles distant. Herrera promised to go if we gave him twenty thirty-thirty cartridges. He would go one day and return the next, a round trip of about fifty miles. We gave him the message to tell those people we had a lot of things to trade for the things they use in every day life. Pelican skin kilts, bows and arrows, oilas, baby cradles, hair brushes and other interesting things. I had already made a trade with Blanco for his *balsa*, promising him sufficient lumber, nails and tools, to make a boat large enough to carry five men. This promise I fulfilled to the letter, and later on another expedition to Seriland I had the pleasure of sailing in this boat, which was well built and seaworthy. The unusual part of this bargain was that Blanco permitted me to deprive him of his only means (apparently) of making a living in hunting *cahuama* for himself and his family, freely and without hesitation, simply on my promise of lumber in the future. I was deeply touched by the trust reposed in me by this old sea rover.

322 [504] These people are splendid mechanics with the crudest of tools---rocks, fire, bones, knives. For instance, the pole of the harpoon was composed of five pieces of driftwood and a seagoing boat which I saw in Guaymas, captured by Mexican fishermen after killing the Seri crew, was composed of fully one hundred pieces of driftwood fastened with nails made of wire, and tied with fiber, and all the seams were filled with a black composition of native origin resembling pitch. Previous [325] to the use of old iron, harpoon points were made of ironwood, but now iron is universally used.

283 [124] I asked old Blanco for some of his native rope. He gave me some of it. He said they get the slender roots of the mesquite and peel the bark, and then the girls and women chew the fibrous wood. This is shredded and twisted into small two-stranded ropes. It is this rope, tied around and around, that holds the *carriso balsa* together.

411
291
576

Fastening feathers on arrows with a sinew held tight in his teeth.
1929

[283]